

**ON  
TRACK  
OFF  
ROAD**







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HOLESHOT MECANIC SPORT

HONDA

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UN MAX DE GOÛT ZERO

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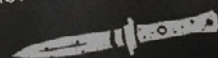


MARVIN MUSQUIN  
PARIS & GENEVA  
SX WINNER



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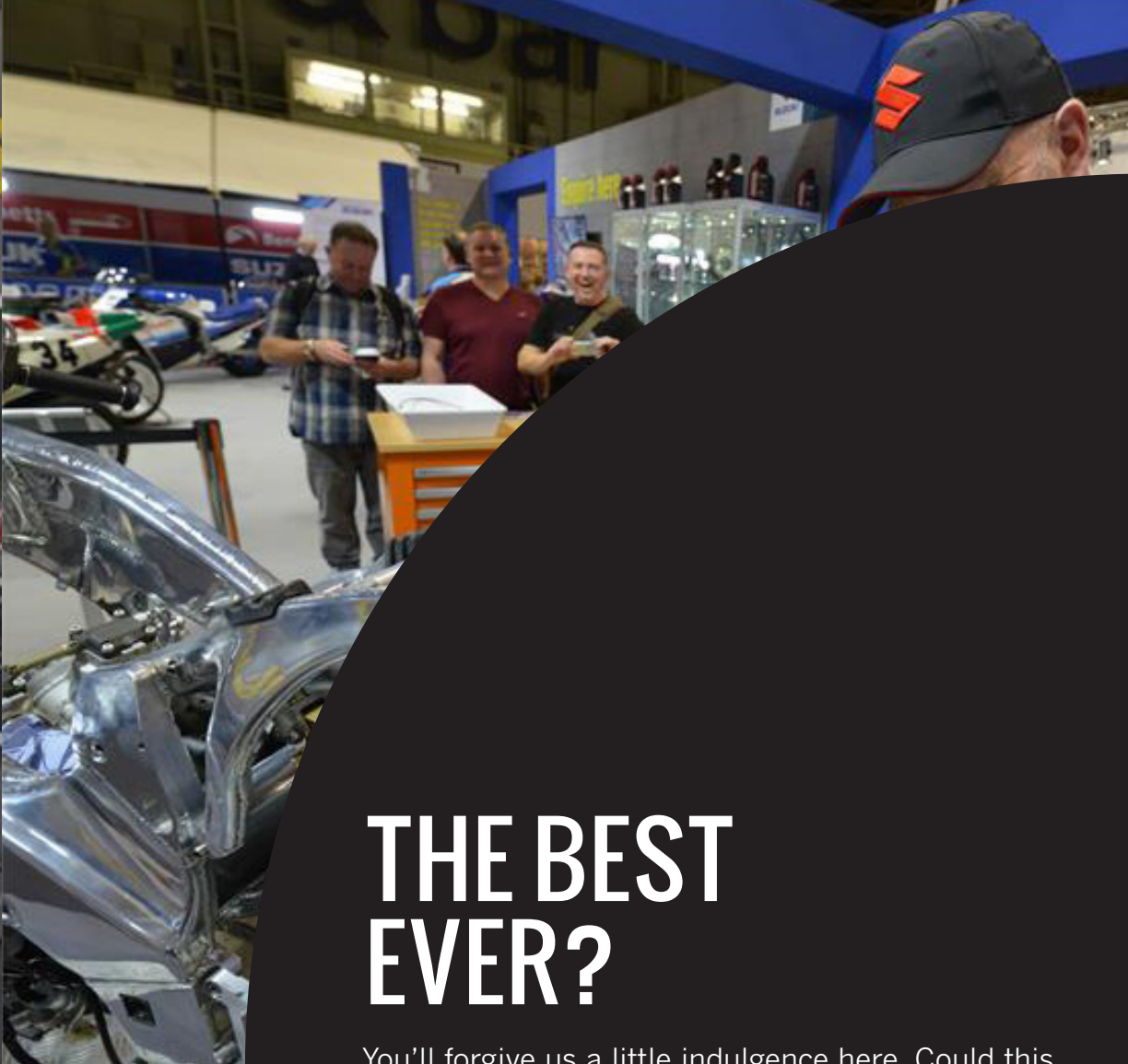
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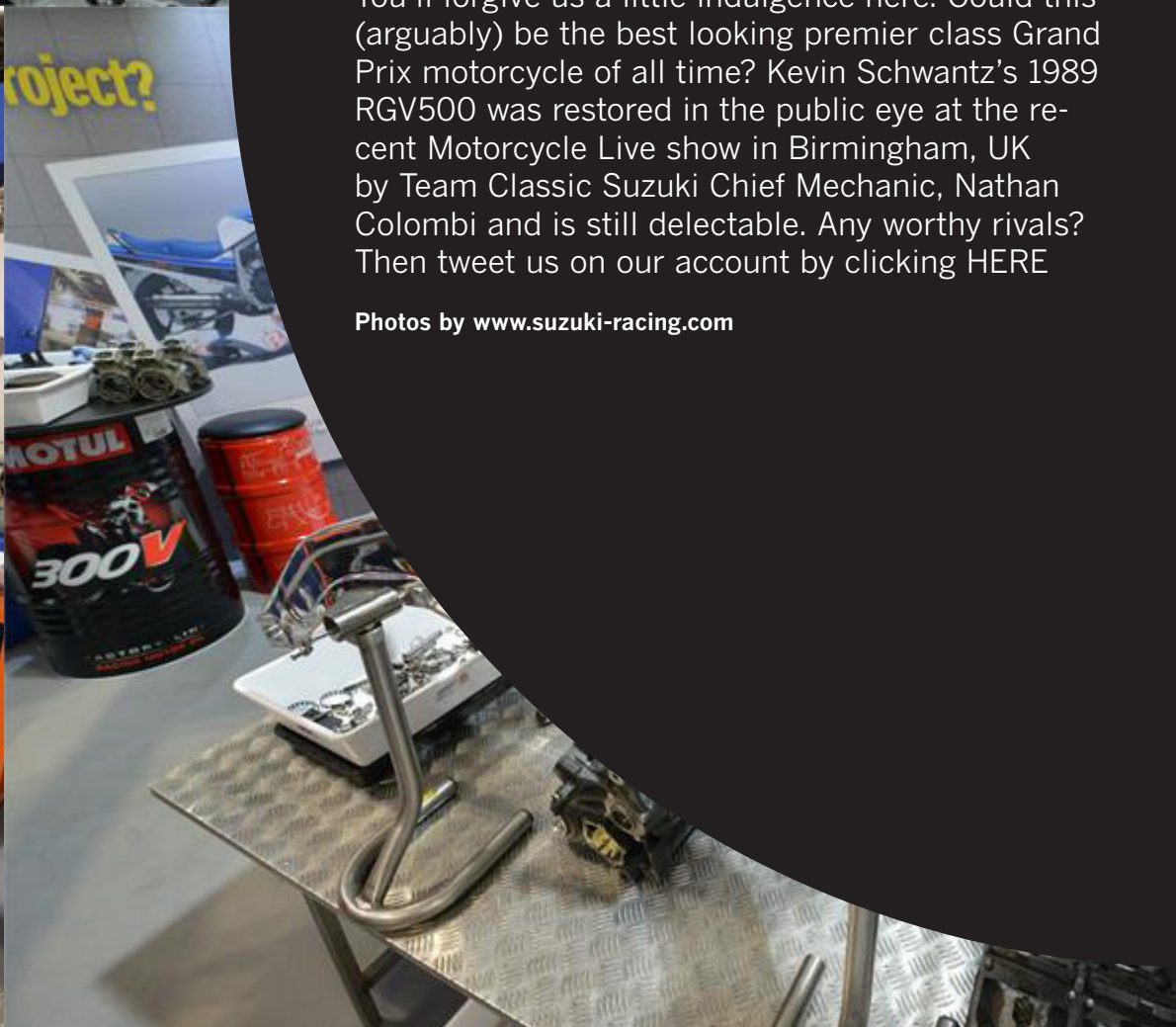




# THE BEST EVER?

You'll forgive us a little indulgence here. Could this (arguably) be the best looking premier class Grand Prix motorcycle of all time? Kevin Schwantz's 1989 RGV500 was restored in the public eye at the recent Motorcycle Live show in Birmingham, UK by Team Classic Suzuki Chief Mechanic, Nathan Colombi and is still delectable. Any worthy rivals? Then tweet us on our account by clicking [HERE](#)

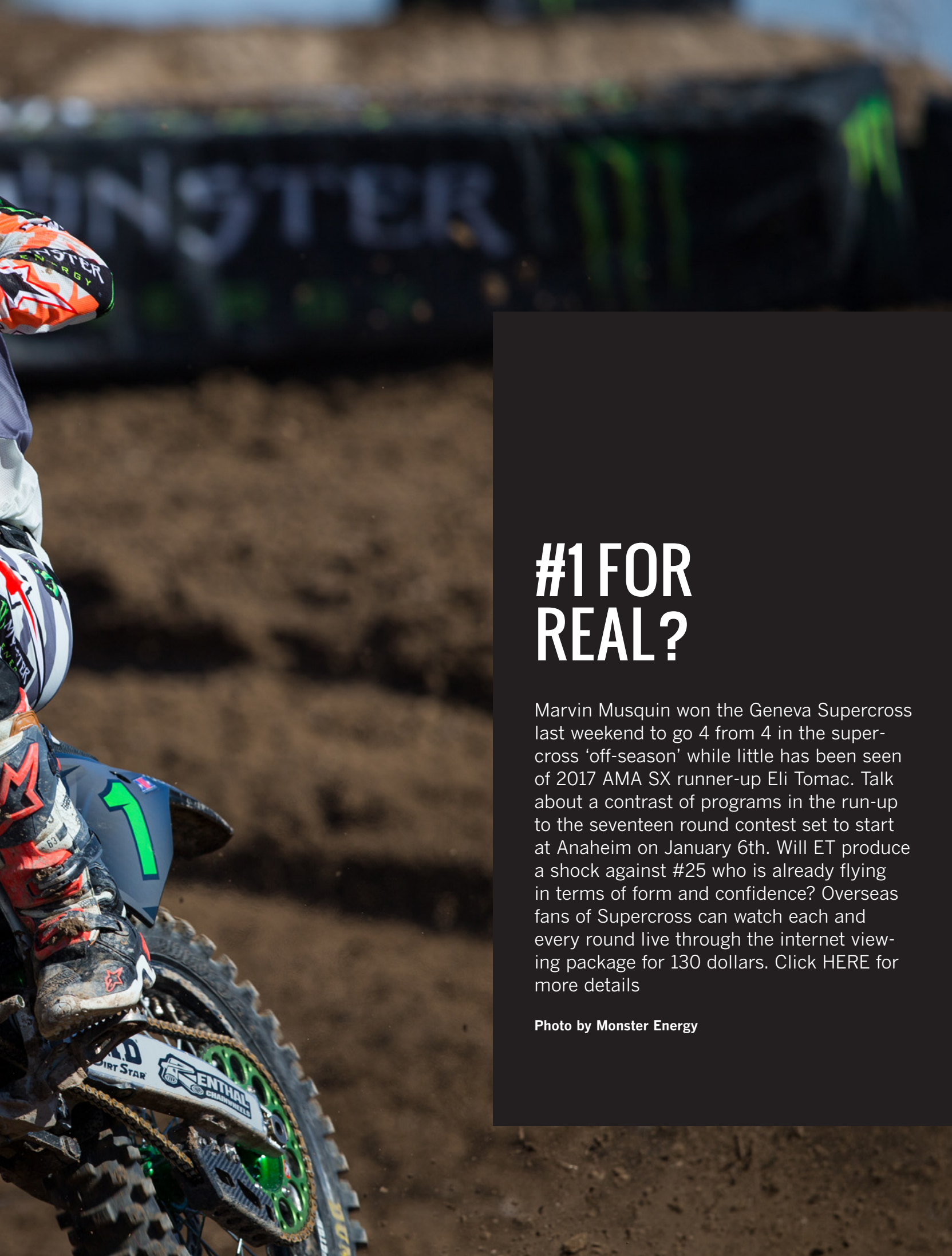
Photos by [www.suzuki-racing.com](http://www.suzuki-racing.com)











# #1 FOR REAL?

Marvin Musquin won the Geneva Supercross last weekend to go 4 from 4 in the supercross 'off-season' while little has been seen of 2017 AMA SX runner-up Eli Tomac. Talk about a contrast of programs in the run-up to the seventeen round contest set to start at Anaheim on January 6th. Will ET produce a shock against #25 who is already flying in terms of form and confidence? Overseas fans of Supercross can watch each and every round live through the internet viewing package for 130 dollars. Click [HERE](#) for more details

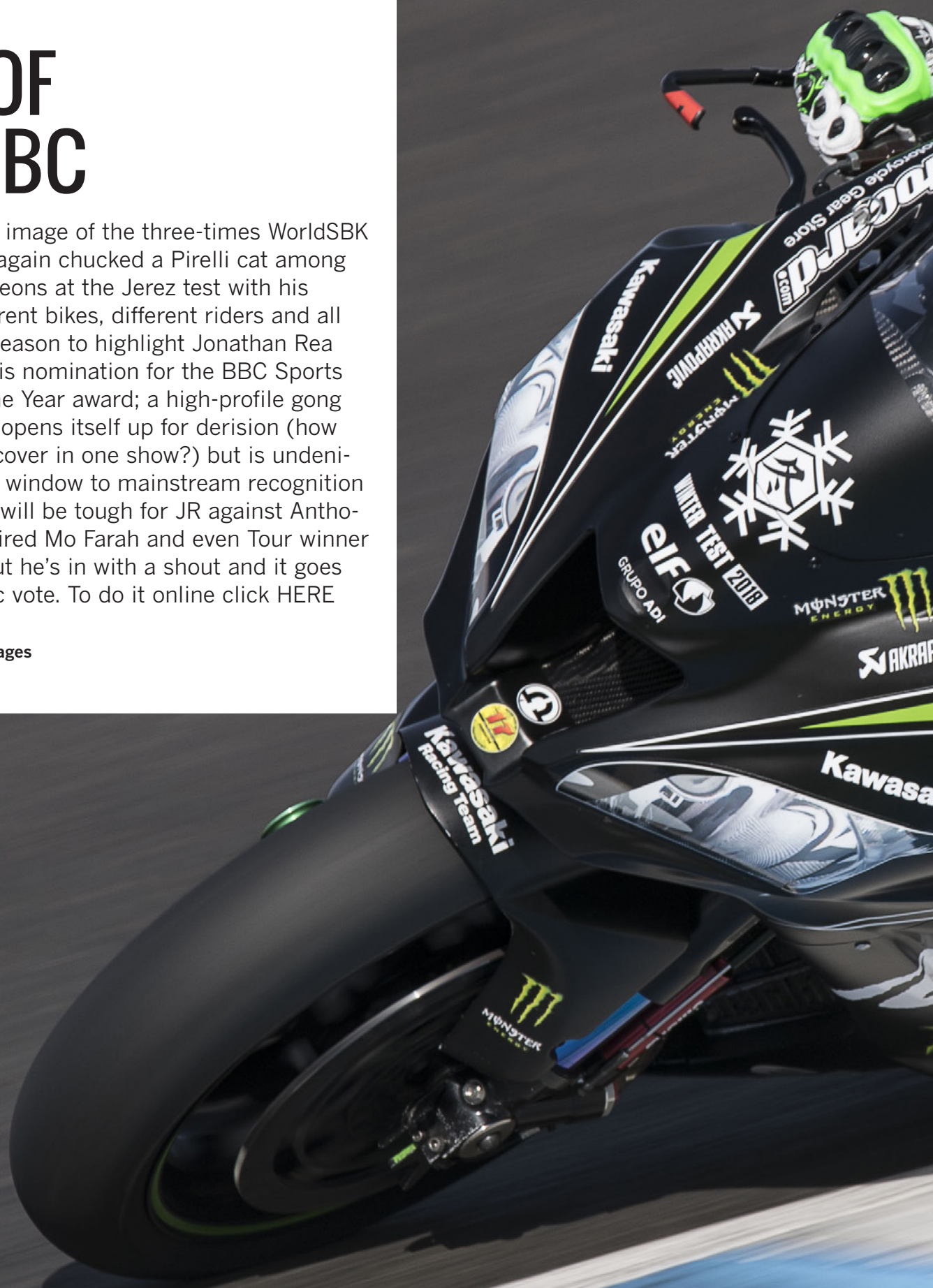
Photo by Monster Energy



# MAN OF THE BBC

A special winter image of the three-times WorldSBK Champion who again chucked a Pirelli cat among the Michelin pigeons at the Jerez test with his speed (but different bikes, different riders and all that). The best reason to highlight Jonathan Rea again involves his nomination for the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award; a high-profile gong that sometimes opens itself up for derision (how much can they cover in one show?) but is undeniable the biggest window to mainstream recognition for any sport. It will be tough for JR against Anthony Joshua, a retired Mo Farah and even Tour winner Chris Froome but he's in with a shout and it goes down to a public vote. To do it online click [HERE](#)

Photo by GeeBee Images











# CHRISTMAS TIME

Many things on the Christmas list this year? Here's the new KTM Factory Edition 450 SX-F for 2018, recently announced and released in the USA Monday evening. Ryan Dungey's retirement means the #1 stays in place metaphorically but this model – to all intents and purposes – will be the bike on which Marvin Musquin and Broc Tickle will attempt to re-plaster the single digit come next May in Las Vegas.

Photo by KTM







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By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Ray Archer (portraits), Cudby/Shepherd (AMA action)

# THE PATIENT MAN

THE STARS ALIGNED IN  
MAGNIFICENT AND DRAMATIC  
FASHION FOR ZACH OSBORNE IN  
2017 SO WE ASKED HIM TO TELL  
US ALL ABOUT CRESTING THE  
PEAK OF AMA 250 RACING...







*"this was the first year where I thought: 'I really have to make something happen here'..."*





**I HOPED THIS INTERVIEW WOULD COME AROUND ONE DAY. I'VE SPOKEN TO ZACH OSBORNE ON MANY OCCASIONS AS THE 28 YEAR OLD MADE HIS WAY THROUGH A FIVE SEASON MXGP ADVENTURE WITH HITS AND HOSPITAL VISITS, MOTOCROSS OF NATIONS AND ISDE APPEARANCES, A 'LAZARUS' STYLE RETURN TO AMA RACING WITH SOME EYE-CATCHING SUPERCROSS WILD-CARDS, GEICO HONDA AND FACTORY HUSQVARNA OPPORTUNITIES AND LASTLY, AND PERHAPS MOST VITALLY, INDUCTION INTO ALDON BAKER'S DESIRABLE TRAINING PROGRAMME THAT WOULD BE THE PLATFORM FOR HIS AMA 250SX (EAST) AND 250MX TITLES IN THE SPACE OF EIGHT MONTHS THIS YEAR...**

The father of one and former British Champion (the only previous championship accolade to his name after emerging onto the Pro scene with much hype and reckoning but losing his way due to injury and a lack of guidance) is in Paris for the annual Supercross and to close a 2017 that not only justified all that talent and hard work but wildly inflated a profile that was already sizeable in motorcycle racing. It was time to finally dissect a campaign where everything at last tumbled into place for #16.

On Friday night at the U Arena there was a moment that nicely summed up the type of person Osborne is. Walking back through the paddock area from a small commentary stint for TV - still fully kitted up and sweaty from one of the Sprint races he completed ten minutes beforehand - he stops at the behest from a small group of kids for a signature on shirts and caps. Although he is less than twenty-five minutes from the Main Event, Osborne still makes the youngsters' evening...and then wanders over for some rapid photos.

The American gained popularity through his stint in Europe thanks to a sharp sense of humour and a humility that easily won fans young and old. That bustling and aggressive riding style, heightened in effect through his comparative lack of height, only added to the mix.

Saturday morning and we meet for a coffee. He's not a Starbucks fan (we won't hold that against him) but there are precious few options on a chilly morning in the French capital's La Defense business district. Over a double espresso and a cereal bar and shortly before he'll join Baker and Marvin Musquin in the hotel gym for a session as part of a carefully considered training schedule (the duo are in the midst of Baker's infamous Bootcamp period and this sojourn to France comes as something of a disruption) Osborne is asked about 2017 once more.







More than the 'good guy makes good' narrative there are also a few other story strands that are impossible to ignore. His union with Baker has been emphatic to the point where the South African's immense standing has only ballooned further. Osborne's realisation of his capability with some tough competition in the 250 division was another hallmark of this year's story. And 2018 will see him talking 450MX outdoors. Most of all, his penultimate corner, last lap move on Joey Savatgy in Las Vegas to seal the 250 East Coast crown at a round where three riders were divided by one point was a career-defining moment.

pushed me to a new high. Going into the season I knew I would do well...I just didn't know how well. I knew I was prepared. It was the first year where I thought 'I really have to make something happen here...'

**Your riding style and the way you attack races seems to shout 'confidence'. I don't think many would regard you as someone weak in that area...**

I wouldn't say weak...I don't know; I think it has been a long road to get back to where I think I belong and where I am comfortable in my surroundings. A lot of it is with the team I am on now. It is like a small family and it is what I had here in Europe and something I really missed when I went back to the Geico team.

***"I THINK AGE IS A MINDSET AND I DON'T REALLY CARE. I'M 28 AND I GET UP EVERY MORNING AND I DON'T THINK I FEEL ANY WORSE THAN I DID WHEN I WAS 16-17..."***

**There are people around you who maybe hoped for a year like 2017 but feared for timing or injury or some reason it might not happen. Did you harbour the same apprehension?**

Yeah, there were some years that maybe could have been this successful or should have been more than they were, but small things held me back, or injuries. More than anything my career has been more of a mental game and being able to believe in myself and really knowing if I could do it or not. This year I made a big step with that and by riding in the winter with Aldon and the guys. I was never the fastest guy and sometimes it was hard to take my knocks; like knowing I was riding pretty good but was not quite fast enough all the time. That kinda

So it has been about getting comfortable and building myself back up. I think that is the biggest difference: my mental attitude and the way I see things.

**It seemed there were a lot of changes going on before you found your way to the Baker programme: Grands Prix, moving teams in the U.S., the ClubMX project, becoming a father...**

Sure. I was part of the ClubMX thing [a private training facility in South Carolina that he co-backed] for four years and there was too much on me. It was time to either do that or go racing and I chose the latter, which turned out to be the right decision obviously. Things like that tend to weigh on you, and everything about this sport demands that you be 100% committed to your





craft everyday. I felt like once I got rid of some of the surrounding distractions and stuff it brought me onto a new high point of my life because I can go riding, do my job and go home and be happy without worrying. Before, I was thinking about the business and this-that-and-the-other and it definitely took something from me. At the top – when you are searching for 1 or 0.5 of a % - and you are already losing it by worrying about something you don't need to be then it is all for nothing.

**Did it gnaw at you that people saw you as the 'nearly' man or the old man of the class that kept missing out?**

I didn't care, and a lot of people were getting bent out of shape about it.

This year is the first time that I've had a 450 opportunity and even when you win a championship there is no guarantee that an opportunity like that will come along. It is a big step and not many people can really cut the mustard in the 450 class...and maybe I won't, I don't know. I feel like I am a pretty good 450 rider but the Supercross scene is a big step. I was pretty prepared for it for 2018 but Husqvarna wanted me to stay in the 250 class. I don't care what people say about that – they don't pay my bills and Husqvarna do!

**The 450: casting the mind back and a qualifying heat win back at the 2009 Motocross of Nations showed some potential...**





ZACH OSBORNE

Yeah, there have been some 'moments' on the 450 and we're ten years removed from that now! People might say: "yeah, you were younger then" and I get it...but I have a point to prove with the 450 deal. Stuff like the Paris Supercross [Osborne would go 2-4 on both days] gives me a bit of confidence what I can do and shows my skills on the bigger bike, even if I don't have that much time on it. I still think I can do some damage.

**Wins and podiums have come over the years but you were a rookie in terms of putting a championship together and this year – 2010 British title excluded – it happened twice. Was there a part of you stressing and thinking 'let's just bring this home...'?**

Yeah, but with the first one [250SX] there was not much time for that because the racing was so hard.

It was maybe the most stressful way to win your first title! I think I slept for like four days after Las Vegas because I was just so emotionally and physically drained from the events that took place. It was a big adjustment for me, not just the racing aspect but also the other obligations like media and social media. It seems like it is never-ending, and every time I pick up my phone it seems there is something else to add to the basket. Being 'that guy' was probably the biggest thing to get my head around. At times it was tougher off the track than it was on it because people wanted to know. I was the big story this year...it was a bit strange for a while.





But you are no stranger to interviews... No, and I don't mind them and I enjoy telling my side of things but there are just so many! After Vegas I must have done thirty in a week. It was a change. The other big thing was going to a race every time and instead of thinking 'hey, maybe we can be on the podium' to 'hey, we're going to win...or maybe not!' Last year we would have been stoked with one and now we were chasing a sixth and we were like 'come on, let's do this!'

## **What does that feel like? That's championship pressure...**

It really was. I can kinda revert back to my British Championship days where I was fighting for a title there but at the same time it is a whole other level of pressure and another level of money on the line for all involved. It is a big effort for a lot of people and at the end of the day the buck stops with you. If you don't win then it's not 'on' anyone else. In Supercross it was a big deal: I was suddenly a winner and with a twenty point lead after four rounds and then it was all gone in a flash [in Detroit a pile-up caused a damaged front wheel and he finished 18th]. Outdoors was a new series and I managed it far better and it was far less stressful.

There were a few shady moments but it was 10% the stress of Supercross!

## **Once you bagged it in Vegas and had days to digest that achievement then attempting another one outdoors must have felt 'familiar' or 'fresh'?**

For sure, and it was almost a relief in a way when we went to Hangtown because I cared...but was not nearly as anxious about winning or anything. I felt that the championship...well, didn't validate my career, but did lift a great weight. I wasn't searching any more for that one big thing to hang my hat on. I've had a great career even if I didn't win any championships but you don't start all this by not envisaging to win.

## **I imagine social media has its pitfalls for being a public figure but for a racer like you with such an international and wide profile across motorcycle racing then it must have been a good way for people to show their appreciation...**

Yeah, of course, although with social media it always feels like 50-50! It is hard to read some of the stuff because people don't really understand what is on the line from the athlete's standpoint. I'm not a social media fan and I don't do it a lot; I probably get in trouble for not doing it enough! I think it gives anyone and everyone a pretty big voice and platform and comments can just spider web out. I guess that was the intention at the beginning. It is tough for me and if it was not something I was contractually obligated to do then I probably wouldn't have it. I enjoy Instagram and I enjoy looking at my friend's photos but at the same time it is not worth the headache of seeing the negativity or positivity.



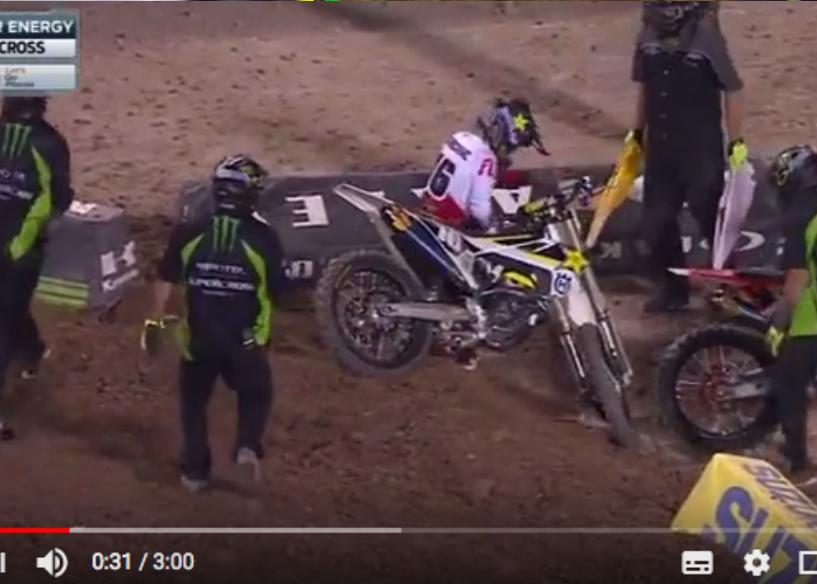


The negative kinda outweighs the positive because you feel the need to fight it but when you do that it is like punching a wall. It can be hard not to let any of it get to you but you try to remember deep down that not many people will understand a situation.

**That last lap video in Vegas could go down as an American racing classic and could be watched many, many years from now. How does that feel?**

It's pretty crazy. Many people have said to me that it was the greatest Supercross race of all time and it is crazy to think that a) that was me and b) I only got seventh place!





It was not the greatest race of all time... but I did ride the race of my life to get back. I wasn't riding to win the championship for most of it because I figured if [Jordan] Smith messed up then Joey [Savatgy] would win; there wasn't a moment where I thought I'd get back [enough] to do the job. When I got up [from the first corner pile-up] I was sorta thinking 'do whatever you can...get as many points and let's see'. With a couple of laps to go I was battling and there was one guy who even passed me back and I was thinking 'I'm gonna be close...but it won't happen'.

### Emotions at that point?

It was an emotional rollercoaster because I thought it was definitely over when I fell on the first turn. I was down forever because the guy I crashed with had his footpeg in my front wheel and

I had to get it out. I was thinking 'it's over...no chance'. Afterwards I was so drained. It had been a stressful race anyway before any of the drama; going there with just one point between three guys is what they [promoters] want. It was a heavy move [the pass on Savatgy] but I wouldn't say it was dirty because he would have done the same and I would have expected him to do the same. Anybody who wouldn't have done the same thing cannot be a racer. If I had not taken that opportunity then I don't know if I could have lived with myself.

### Go back half a lap. Did it dawn on you that the championship was in your grasp?

Definitely not. Even on the last lap. I've watched the race all the way through maybe fifty times and other parts of it way-more than that! But when we came



back into the stadium on the last lap there were five turns left and I still had to pass Hayden Mellross and get to Joey as he was a few bike lengths ahead. I did Mellross in two turns and when we went into the whoops I was like 'man...maybe!' and that was two straights before I got to him. I went as hard as I possibly could. I am still confused as to how he did not know I was there.

**That 'maybe' moment must have been like an explosion inside of you. Like running downstairs at Christmas...**

It was! The whole race is a little bit strange for me. You read about and see this phenomena in the movies where people are so totally engaged in the moment, their brain has stopped and they are totally functioning...and that is literally what it was like for me once I got going. I was just clicking it off and I don't remember much of the race at all. I had one pretty big moment in one of the rhythm lanes where I almost endo-ed and I remember that and I also remember in the hallway before the race there was a quote written on the door that said 'if you want something you've never had, then you have to do something you've never done' and I thought of that with two turns to do. There was a little double into the first whoops section and I was going way-too fast but somehow I managed to pull it off. It was one of those things where you cross the finish line and you almost wake-up. It was unreal.

**Do you ever catch yourself seeing the clip now and wondering who is on that #16 bike?**

Yeah! Also I'll sit on the couch and see it and my hands will start to get sweaty. I was doing some cardio yesterday with Aldon and Marvin at a steady 130 [bpm]

and I was watching the race and when I crossed the finish I'd gone up to 147.

**What has this year done for you generally? Has it given you a second wind? Has it stoked your motivation even more?**

I feel re-charged. There is a point in your career where you feel 'it's not happening, it's not happening, it's not happening' and you hear the word 'no' a lot and it starts to wear on you. I feel that I have another four-five good years left in me as long as I'm healthy. I love what I do and over the last couple of years I have been a bit obsessed with finding out how good I can be. Not in a cocky way- Well, that's being a Pro athlete isn't it? Yeah. It's about how far I can take this thing. I think that has been the biggest difference for me: I have been eating, living and sleeping motocross down to the word. It is all I think about.

**Is that dangerous as well?**

It can be...if you are a little bit in the hole. In 2016 we had some issues towards the end of the season and I was really bummed out because my form was good and I was top three-five every weekend and then I finally won a race. The following weekend was another setback; so it was a tough time. But I think if you can keep it in check and also have things like your family to take you away from it sometimes...

**Are you in your prime?**

Physically, mentally and riding-wise: everything is where I feel I should have been ten years ago. But I also understand that the process and the way things can go is also part of the story and it probably would not be nearly as special to me if it had come a bit easier or earlier.





0 FEATURE



It would not be the same if I was nineteen and a champion. I think age is a mindset and I don't really care. I'm 28 and I get up every morning and I don't think I feel any worse than I did when I was 16-17. Or maybe even better because I am flat-out more motivated and driven to make things happen.

**Are you also an example that there is a time for everyone? And that not all sports people and athletes can be a 16-17-18 year old revelation?**

Exactly. I guess, by the book, I should have been one of those people...but I didn't give up on it so quickly. I feel that so many people kinda hit some road-blocks and then that is that. They also get written off and that's a lesson for the teams in my opinion. There are guys out there as good as me or maybe better but they have not had the right opportunity or surroundings to put them in a place where they could excel.

**Some decision-making must also be down to luck...that's the frustrating part...**

Yeah, and some guys don't seem to give a shit what team they are on. They want to get paid or wear this type of kit. I'm more of a people person, and I need feedback from the guys around me and need to be comfortable with everything I have going on. It's a big thing for me and I think it is important to find your niche place in life and racing as well.

**How much would you credit Aldon for helping you reach that prime patch?**

A lot. He has kind of pulled the reigns back on me. I have had a lot of trainers and I really believed in the one before Aldon and he was the first guy that I

completely trusted in everything that was going on...but with Aldon I go to bed at night and I do not think or doubt in anything. I go there and I do what he tells me and I don't question anything.

**That's a leap of faith...**

Yeah but it has also been the biggest advancement for me: to have zero doubts and have that total trust. You bring that aura with you of being 'one of Aldon's guys' and knowing you are going to be fast and be 'there'. That's a little bit of where the confidence comes from. You feel a bit superior.

**Power by association.**

Pretty much.

**So he's not in your face saying 'You're number one...'**

Never. I don't think he's ever said that to me! He is never over-confident or trying to tell you any of that stuff. The confidence comes from the work that you do and the fact that his history is pretty successful! It is easy to lay your head on that.

**Lastly, you have your name in the record books and you have a profile, you have some money and recognition. Is it all about legacy now and inspiring people?**

I hope so. I definitely don't want to live my life [only] on my riding. I want to make a mark in other aspects too, like trying to be a good person. I think people see that you don't have to be a dickhead to be a champion. I hope people will remember me as a humble guy and for other things as well. I hope I can inspire kids and other people in my situation: when you are 26 years old and nothing has really happened. It is all still to play for.



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By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Ray Archer

# 2017 MX2:







WITH JEFFREY HERLINGS OUT OF THE WAY MX2 BREATHED A LITTLE MORE IN 2017 BUT RED BULL KTM WERE STILL TRIUMPHANT FOR THE TENTH TIME IN FOURTEEN SEASONS AND WITH THEIR SEVENTH DIFFERENT RIDER IN THAT PERIOD (SINCE MX2 WAS CONCEIVED IN 2004). HERLINGS HAD BEEN THE SCOURGE OF THE CLASS SINCE 2012 AND HIS DEPARTURE TO MXGP BEQUEATHED VICTORY OPPORTUNITIES TO ALMOST DOUBLE THE AMOUNT OF RACE WINNERS IN 2017 COMPARED TO 2016; SIX OF SEVEN WALKING THE TOP STEP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR CAREERS.

ACROSS NINETEEN ROUNDS AND THIRTY-EIGHT MOTOS (ADD ANOTHER NINETEEN FOR QUALIFICATION HEATS) HERE IS OUR JUDGEMENT ON WHO WAS THE PICK OF THE BUNCH.

# 1. PAULS JONASS

**RED BULL KTM, LATVIA, 1st**

OK, picking the world champion as number one might seem obvious but it brings us full circle. In 2015 we selected Pauls Jonass as our top choice in MX2 for what was his first Grand Prix season as a Red Bull KTM rider and in which he almost grabbed the crown after being thrust into the unlikely position of team leader in the wake of Jeffrey Herlings' dislocated hip. 2016 and Jonass crashed too much; the scary concussion at Loket in the Czech Republic causing a head injury that would both positively and negatively affect 2017.

The positives were immediately evident. This season witnessed a more settled, mature and considerate 20 year old. The Latvian adopted the mantle of KTM's lead force in a category they have largely dominated and won when he could and snared points and podiums when he couldn't. His work with Marc de Reuver and the mental side of being a championship contender should not be undervalued, and the manner of his fast and faultless 1-1 maiden Grand Prix win at the opener in Qatar set a tone and bar of performance that he'd live beside for the next six months. Jonass was the most prolific podiummer of the year in both classes and sprayed champagne (some-

times with more style than others) on fifteen occasions from nineteen, six from the highest plinth. He had mini episodes of drama with Jeremy Seewer and his teammate Jorge Prado

SEEMINGLY ALWAYS SMILING AND LAUGHING AND WITH ENDEARING HUMILITY, JONASS RACED WITH ENERGY AND BROUGHT A LARGE DOSE OF IT OFF THE TRACK AS WELL.

and was one of many caught out by the bog of Indonesia but was largely ever-present in the leading crop, particularly around the first turns of most race starts. The negative influence of the 2016 Loket crash came through the need to relinquish the handlebars as soon as the job was done. Jonass – in need of a break - did not race again in 2017 after his milestone success for rider and country in the swamp of Villars sous Ecot and the last GP of the campaign. Seemingly always smiling and laughing and with endearing humility, Jonass raced with energy and brought a large dose of it off the track as well. Set to wear the #1 plate and to show it in Grand Prix for only the second time since 2010, MX2 has a very worthy and celebrated defending champion for 2018.



## 2. JEREMY SEEWER

**TEAM SUZUKI, SWITZERLAND, 2nd**

Jeremy Seewer's career plan had been chiming along nicely. 10th in his rookie year, 5th in his second and then runner-up in 2016; he was on course for the top prize and had a factory MXGP contract for 2018. His age (23) meant '17 would be a last chance at the MX2 throne. Like his time frame (and, as it would happen, his situation with Suzuki), the Swiss would only just miss out. 39 points (from hauls that stood at 771-732) was the difference in a dispute with Jonass that went down to the last. As runner-up again Jeremy was the first classified rider from only three in the top nine of the final standings that represented a Japanese manufacturer.

From both MXGP and MX2 classes his thirteen podium finishes were the second highest of 2017. Seewer frequently battled the speed and starting prowess of the KTMs and Husqvarnas and although he made some costly mistakes he must have gnawed a fist at times in his quest to be on level footing. Like five others Seewer was a first-time winner in 2017 and won only one Grand Prix less than Jonass; his racecraft improved and his fearless flights from the depths of the top ten came to be one of the distinctive sights of 2017 MX2.

His efforts in Portugal were spectacular and the way he moved and motivated a sun-kissed home crowd at Frauenfeld produced some of the most rousing scenes in Grand Prix this year (such a shame he fell at the beginning of that second moto in Switzerland). Jeremy's progress has been easy and satisfying to chart. The slight and boyish racer from his early years replaced by a strong, flexible and uncompromising athlete in 2016 and 2017. He admitted in these pages that the mental intricacies of mounting a championship campaign where a challenge to balance (how far does one push in a win-it-or-bin-it approach?) but he nevertheless remained a persistent threat to both Jonass and KTM.

If #91 had been on an orange or white motorcycle in 2017 then the outcome could have been different or at least even closer. A new pasture for a rider that tends to avoid injury and is a popular draw awaits in 2018 and it should be Yamaha blue. His potential for MXGP is a mystery and the last two riders with similar unknown quantities won the title in 2015 and 2016.













# 3. THOMAS KJER OLSEN

**ROCKSTAR ENERGY HUSQVARNA FACTORY RACING, DENMARK, 3rd**

'TKO' showed his chops in 2017 and transferred that supreme EMX250 European Championship winning pedigree straight into Grand Prix. Thomas' was the rookie in Jacky Martens' fecund trio of young Husqvarna-equipped talent but frequently took his chances to match and even outshine teammates Thomas Covington and Conrad Mewse. Eclipsing his brother Stefan's potential, Kjer Olsen splashed Denmark back on the motocross map for the first time in more than a decade with his long raking frame and submission to the twisted shapes of the FC250.

The role and guidance of Rasmus Jorgensen has to be credited into how TKO transitioned so excellently from European to global level and he was already a top five runner in the first three rounds. Errors and misjudgement were to be expected and did occur. Considering his steady presence near the front of MX2 it seems a surprise that he only posted one podium in 2017; his excellent win at the Grand Prix of Latvia. By his own admission Kjer Olsen seemed to run out of steam after that high point at Kegums although he would win another moto in Russia.

Thomas might have earned the bronze medal in 2017 and his first term in GP – which is a major achievement in itself – but it is the knowledge that he has that much more speed and stamina to come that helps with the overall impression that Martens has another special one on his hands. If the FC250 can keep its insatiable drive to the first turn for 2018 and Kjer Olsen can keep that tall build at a decent weight then TKO will be first up at the bell.



## 4. JORGE PRADO

**RED BULL KTM, SPAIN, 7th**

Spain's great hope had a debut season that made the sixteen year old (in just his second term of racing on a 250 four-stroke motorcycle) laugh and cry, sometimes both together and sometimes for different reasons. In Qatar for his maiden Grand Prix as a full-time factory rider the immensely talented youngster and arguably the best starter to enter the world championship in recent years was upset and emotional at an underwhelming eighth place finish. A month later and the tears would be rolling again... but this time from the peak of the rostrum for round five at Arco di Trento in Italy; Spain's first win since Jonathan Baragan's success in Catalunya almost ten years ago.

Prado took an unprecedented first trophy on his GP debut at Assen in 2016 and set expectations. He was brilliant and baffling in 2017 as four more podiums arrived and two wins – both in the sand – but then pulled out of hot Grands Prix in Italy, Portugal and the USA.

His starts were a joy to behold; he'd probably holeshot on an 85 but once too often he'd fail to hold the pace. 2017 was always going to be an adventure for a teenage that only turned sixteen less than two months before the season began. The diversity of tracks and the sheer quantity of motos would be a major stretch for KTM's next major star and one that deservingly sits in the lineage of Townley, Rattray, Searle, Musquin, Roczen, Herlings, Tixier and Jonass.

Yes, he may be part of the best team and with the best motorcycle for 2017 and can look around to count on the support and advice of people like Tony Cairoli, Claudio De Carli, Dirk Gruebel, Jeffrey Herlings and Pit Beirer but Prado gave a satisfying jolt of the future with his 2017 toe-dip and his rivals for the next two years – before Supercross comes calling – might do well to watch out for his benchmarks.





TOP FIVE MX2 RIDERS FROM 2017







## 5. THOMAS COVINGTON

**ROCKSTAR ENERGY HUSQVARNA FACTORY RACING, USA, 5th**

Mexican Grand Prix flashes aside, Thomas Covington has been a slow-burner since his decision to learn as much from MX2 and international racing as possible. 2017 was his fourth season in the class and just his second with the same team and motorcycle and the American showed real signs of progression. At the season started in Qatar he was the sole rider in the division with GP winning experience.

Two DNS's from the first four motos meant a low-key launch to the campaign but from another resurging appearance at Leon in Mexico the confidence started to re-appear. Covington generated enough speed to win motos, and he did so on five occasions – the third highest total in the category – but inconsistency was his failing. The #64 would trouble the holeshotters in one moto and then be found languishing in the top twenty in the next.

At Italian, Portuguese and Czech Grands Prix he seemed to figure it out and was on the box three times in a row and also sprayed champagne at his home GP as well as winning a very tricky last meeting in France. From the last six rounds however three scorecards like 12-0, 5-25, 20-8 almost tell the story of the campaign.

Thomas is so nearly a genuine championship player that it is a relief he has two more attempts to be the first American title winner this century. A knee ligament injury at the Motocross of Nations – a ride that he chased but then also deserved as much as any other U.S. athlete – was a cruel finale to a year in which Covington teed himself up to be one of the few real contenders for 2018.









# ANSWER

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A N S W E R R A C I N G . C O M







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## leatt

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Leatt's 4.5 helmet has just hit the shelves. This is the mid-price range offering of their turbine technology and multi density impact foam lid comes at a reasonable 259 euro/239,99 dollars/179 pound mark. Leatt claim that even this scaled back version of the GPX 6.5 carbon and the 5.5 composite shell models still 'helps to reduce the risk of head impact at concussion level by up to 30% and rotational acceleration to your head and brain by up to 40%. Eleven turbines, made of an energy-absorbing material which hardens on impact, are strategically placed inside the helmet.' Leatt have significantly upped their game in terms of design and colourways and the virtues of the GPX cannot really be seen until you hold one in your hands to appreciate the weight and slim dimensions. Knowing that Leatt have honed beneficial safety measures and can still churn out the GPX for a good price makes this a very strong helmet option.

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# THE ROAD MAP?

Grand Prix calendars can often mean just a collection of dates, numbers, places and a volume of commitment but I found myself looking at the schedule for 2018 MXGP the other day in a slightly different way. Maybe more distance helps. Covering the entire series and the Motocross of Nations involves a minimum of twenty-one weekends now; it is a monstrous level of competition and compromise for everyone involved; from the promoters to the bootwashers.

In the past a calendar would have meant some careful planning and analysis of where to go and when. Some dates would prompt curiosity (the Nations at RedBud is still probably the fixture that throbs the most for me from the 2018 list) while others would force a grimace due to the track, the conditions or simply the rigmarole of travelling.

Obviously the most blatant aspect of MXGP in 2018 is the size of the road map. Grand Prix might only be heading out of Europe on four occasions (one of those constitutes an Indonesian back-to-back) but it is still a trail that outstrips MotoGP by one event and in a period two months shorter than the road racers whom compete from March to November.

The MXGP calendar is undoubtedly making a statement and sometimes the roster can be indicative of the state of the sport. Talking with a prominent MXGP Team Manager just last week he pointed out the type of circuits. From twenty races ten feature new-build venues. Tracks like Argentina might only be three years old but is already the favourite for many racers while courses in Imola, Indonesia, Turkey (and even Spain to a degree as Red Sands has long been a popular winter training destination but should have a new GP spec) remain a mystery and could be loved or loathed.

As I've mentioned before MXGP certainly doesn't lack diversity and the best intentions of Youthstream to make the best, safest and most

enjoyable tracks for the 'show' but experiments can go awry and there are sometimes contrasts in quality (or if the weather throws a spanner). The oldest circuits are in a group that involve Valkenswaard, Talkessel, Pietramurata, Agueda, St Jean d'Angely and Uddevalla (Matterley Basin is now eleven years old) so the accusation that MXGP is leaving the 'old-school' behind doesn't quite ring true and from that clutch more than half are not renowned for their wealth of lines or passing opportunities. There is a danger of leaving the rose-tinted specs on top of the head when it comes to tradition and history-steeped tracks.



By Adam Wheeler



Older riders might turn their noses up at over-manufactured and busy modern layouts but they will be the first to grumble at the limitations of some well-established sites that have long outgrown 21st century MXGP or are resistant to change for the type of TV-orientated racing that now has to be part of the fabric of motocross.

Why is MXGP so big? And why is 50% of it new-fangled? Youthstream claim they have an abundance of circuits and organisations wanting a Grand Prix slot, and these could be for regional promotion reasons, a wealthy fan benefactor who wants MXGP in his/her territory or a company with ideals of event-promotion riches. Youthstream themselves have a hefty crew that need paying and employment for the majority of the year and creating a soup of a championship means adding various ingredients.

There will be the backbone and stable Grands Prix, the 'speculative' Grands Prix, the key-market Grands Prix, the well-funded Grands Prix and the quality of the associated tracks also come into the equation. The importance of the event (does a Grand Prix tick a box for an emerging market?) can often come before the assurance of a first-rate track.

The teams and brands of course have to stretch to complete this calendar and 2018 will show the first signs of strain with the investment for racing not quite matching estimations of dirt bike sales for some manufacturers and budgets have been duly trimmed. MXGP will still line-up with exceptional talent and another championship story is enticingly unpredictable but the absence of 'yellow' and reduction of 'red' and 'green' will be noticeable compared to previous seasons.

Twenty events is like pinning a big bright badge of health. A gaggle of new and enthusiastic countries wanting to join the series is another positive aspect (China's inclusion in 2019 will be a milestone). Track preparation has been improved significantly, even if the moulding of recently-built circuits could still be reviewed and tweaked; WW Motocross Park in Florida last year, for example, was a case of over-boiling the egg. However, motocross should take care not to eat itself. If manufacturers and brands are warning against the financial burden of further expansion then all parties should be alert to keeping MXGP as strong and eclectic on the track as it appears to be off it.







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**CALENDAR 2018**

## Latest Videos



## Most Popular Videos



# mxgp

The FIM Motocross World Championship can be watched in its entirety (and then some) thanks to a cool 'earlybird' offer with the official website. For just 99 euros web viewers can access the 'premium pass' that includes: live and OnDemand races from all MXGP events, qualification races and Saturday and Sunday European Championship motos. The pack also offers full coverage of the Monster Energy FIM Motocross of Nations from RedBud as well as the 'Behind the Gate' video magazines. The interface is quite easy to use and motos can be watched at any time. Youthstream already pump out excellent highlights clips on the official YouTube channel but the MXGP-TV.com source is the best way to see Grand Prix. Save 30 euros by checking out the current offer. Click on one of the links on this page.





Photo: R. Schedl

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Photo: R. Schedl

# DOMINATE THE BATTLE FOR SUPREMACY

## THE WEAPON OF CHOICE

At the pinnacle of motocross, the sharpest weapon always prevails. For 2018, KTM has refined the KTM 450 SX-F, delivering unrivaled power, razor-sharp handling, and aggressive styling, making this motorcycle the ultimate weapon to race into your next on-track battle.

**KTM**





# AT THE HELM?

SCOTT'S 550 HELMET PROMISES A LOT IN TERMS OF HEAD PROTECTION AND PERFORMANCE FOR A SIGNIFICANT AND REASONABLE PRICE. HOW WAS THAT POSSIBLE? WE ASKED ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE 550 AND WHY IT MIGHT CAUSE A STIR IN A SATURATED MARKET...

By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Scott Sports









## 0 FEATURE

Scott Sports have previously been a 'head-to-toe' brand for off-road motorcyclists but it is not harsh to speculate that their excellent goggles and curious experiments with boots were the main catchpoints for many riders. Body protection was another strong area and their riding gear was also of quality, even if it did lack some of the design sharpness compared to brands like Fox, Alpinestars and Answer. Their efforts with helmets were well intentioned but fairly uninspiring.

After pushing out a 550 riding boot that boasted a 'tulip' construction and featured a couple of other interesting specs and the innovative Prospect goggle, Scott have now finalised four years of research and graft into the new 550 helmet. And for good reason the firm are getting shouty about what they have achieved for a price point just over 250 euros.

"When Scott develops a product then we are usually looking at the market a lot and what kind of innovation we can bring," says Export Sales Manager Matt Lalloz. "We could see that this [helmet] market remains really conservative and there are always ways for improvement. We have made mistakes in the past but at least we were bringing ideas and I think

this 550 is something that is really reaching the next step. For sure people will need to understand it because Scott is not seen as a helmet brand so they will need to see what is behind the concept."

"This is the first helmet we have made in-house for motorcycles," says Helmet Product Manager Paul Batsch. "Before we had an open-mould from the factory and that's what many brands do... but our goal was to have a real 'homemade' project."

## FLOW

Safety, ventilation, identity and cost are the four watchwords for the 550. The need to sculpt a helmet that serves a purpose for the rider in everyday function as well as performing in the event of a crash was key for the design team and they channelled that focus into their 'channels'.





“We looked at ‘benchmark’ helmets for enduro and motocross and what many people were using,” says Lead Engineer Anatole Deheselle. “We took those helmets and looked at what was happening inside and in terms of ventilation. We found a lot of tiny holes and channels. We took our knowledge from bicycle and winter helmets to make our own improvements and ideas.”

“What we did is make super-deep channels inside to drive the air into the helmet. We have a big air intake in the front to bring as much air as possible. You have a lot of circulation flow for hot conditions. This was a big focus. We could make our own mould and we did the design in sketches, in 2D and 3D to make sure it worked and then went to a lab in Milan with a wind tunnel where we could really test the helmet in riding conditions. We used ours against some of the bestsellers and simulated a 40 minute ride at 60kmph average speed and thanks to a headform with a lot of sensors we could create a map against the others.”

“I remember using helmets in the past that had holes for ventilation and I never actually felt that effect,” reflects former Pro racer and Supercrossers Lalloz. “I think it is a good question for many riders: do you really feel ventilation in your helmet? I’m 99% sure that the majority will

say no. Why? Because most of the holes and channels will be the same as a road helmet where you can be doing 100-200kmph, whereas in motocross it will be between 45-55. It is a low average and we analysed this from the beginning.”

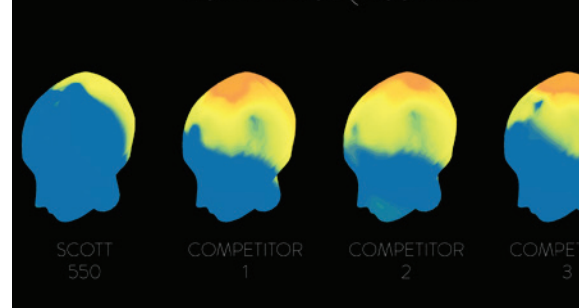
“We compared many competitors - some leading brands - at 45kmph and this was the key in the development of our own product,” he adds. “It was not easy because you also need to follow the certification guidelines and cannot put massive holes everywhere. It was a big job and several years of development. It is also an exclusive Scott product designed by Scott engineers with some knowledge from bicycles in there as well.”

“We tried to take a different approach based on our own knowledge and took it all the way,” affirms Batsch.

Scott have achieved an airy helmet – see the image from the wind tunnel tests with a larger blue ‘cool’ spread around the head – but they also needed to add versatility. Not everyone rides in Californian sunshine. To cater for this the helmet comes with different densities of foam inserts that can be slotted into the ducts for winter or sandy/dusty conditions.



40MIN RACE @ 60KM/H





**BATSCH: “OVERALL WE SAID ‘IF WE CAN DESIGN SOMETHING THAT IS OURS THEN LET’S DO IT DIFFERENTLY. PEOPLE WOULD NOT BUY OUR ‘REPLICA’ OF ANOTHER BRAND...THEY LIKED IT WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT.”**

The extent of the airflow also was considered with the goggle fitting.

“Everything was tested with a goggle for real riding conditions and goggles are getting bigger and bigger which means the gap between the top of the goggle and the helmet is getting smaller,” says Batsch. “This means less air coming into the goggle and more risk of fog. The channels on our helmet really help to keep the circulation of air into and out of the goggle as well. There is obviously a smart connection with the Prospect goggle, and the temperature inside was lower compared to other helmets.”

## WORKING TECHNOLOGY

Helmets now offer more than just a hard shell and a dual density EPS. Regular readers of OTOR will have seen the efforts of companies like 6D, Leatt, MIPS and lately Bell and now Shoei in creating advanced methods tackling rotational acceleration and

concussion thresholds. Scott knew that a new helmet offering had to have extra technical considerations. Therefore the 550 comes with MIPS and a ‘Conehead’ liner configuration as part of the architecture and the use of a polycarbonate shell to keep costs in check.

“Safety is critical to us,” stresses Deheselle. “We know that winter and bicycle sports are totally different and not with the same degree of strength in a crash but based on our knowledge we know that the nature of accidents can be similar.”

“We had a discussion with Matt about MIPS and you can see it with many different types of companies, from those with technical helmets to those with fairly basic ones,” explains Batsch. “MIPS is a third-party company so it is totally dedicated to this rotational field. We have been looking at a lot of existing solutions on the market. All the research behind MIPS and the technicians and PHDs working on the technology really make us believe in it.

Of course you can find other solutions and we could come up with something in-house against rotational acceleration but at the moment – as a brand – we are not able to measure this kind of strain and consequences to the brain. This is why we still work with MIPS.”

“The good thing about MIPS is that it was designed to retro-fit other helmets,” says Deheselle. “They were initially operating at a time when rotational acceleration was not considered by helmets brands...until 6D came along and really highlighted the issue. We were the third brand to work with MIPS on a winter helmet. Brands without MIPS now have to find or justify some other safety story to sell their helmet. In bicycles MIPS has become the norm.”

Above the MIPS liner and Conehead (a peculiar shaped EPS that address angular impact) comes the shell and Scott went with plastic material for good reason. “The goal was to make a safe helmet but not one that was 700 euros,” reveals Batsch.

“We really wanted to make something that was safe and affordable and for that we chose not to have a composite or carbon shell but again based on our knowledge we





are really confident that a polycarbonate shell is as safe as any other."

"It is question we had many times: what is safer between fibreglass and a polycarbonate shell? And actually it is hard to give a statement because you can have a polycarbonate shell that is really thin and optimised to be right on the limit for the testing, the same for fibreglass," says Deheselle.

"Then you will have some other helmets that will pass both DOT and ECE standards so the shell has to be bigger and these are actually safer because they are optimised for two tests. In our case the helmet is made to pass both. We have a 3mm shell ready for DOT; which is a procedure that tests impacts all over the helmet. ECE is only in specific areas and some helmets go really thin with the shell in other places which results

in a very light helmet, but if you have an impact in a place away from the ECE zones then you have a problem. So for polycarbonate shells it depends on how thick the shell is and what is the philosophy behind the helmet."

"You can find affordable composite shells...but then it also depends on the quality of the material that is used," reasons Batsch.



“The quality of carbon and fiberglass can play a huge role in the performance of the helmet and shock absorption. For what we wanted to achieve with the helmet and the price point we decided to work with a plastic shell and we pass both ECE and DOT tests with what we have done.”

“The goal of this helmet was also to bring safety for everybody,” justifies Lalloz. “People have this tendency to think ‘more expensive means safer’. Carbon is a light and expensive material but nobody has yet proved it is safer. Safety is increased by technology inside. It was important to show the market that this helmet could have an acceptable price but also a lot of performance.”

## GETTING FIXED

The first noticeable aesthetic of the 550 is the fixed visor. The peak streamlines into the rest of the helmet. What was the design thinking behind this?

“We wanted the design be super-subtle and sleek and integrated and we couldn’t do that with a helmet from other suppliers so we had to do our own thing,” says Batsch.







## MAKING OF SCOTT'S 550 HELMET

"Some people really like it; the integration and the strong lines and it provokes a reaction. We didn't just want to copy-paste a helmet from a popular brand. We wanted our own DNA."

"Many people will adjust the visor position to the maximum upward tilt, not for the shade but the way it looks," believes Lalloz. "The visor has a function but also a look and that's why we thought it could have a fixed position. I was thinking about the successful ALS 1 helmet from JT Racing in the 1990s and that had a fixed visor. So we went in that direction and kept it minimalist and stylish."

The peak is held in place by two hidden but accessible screws and crucially allows extra air intake possibilities. "For sure it is replaceable and it must break when you have a crash; that's important and you can see that by what Fox did with their magnet system," says Batsch. "It's a common question but it can be replaced and has a really smooth integration."

Fox garnered plenty of attention with their magnet system on the V3; the effectiveness and popularity of which has still to be gauged from the market. "At this time we could not go for magnets," opines Batsch.

"That also kept the costs down. Our goal was not to make a crazy-expensive helmet and with magnets - and the injection points - it would have meant extra. It is also a less mechanical solution."

"It is also tricky to find a visor that will not pop out when it is hit by a stone but will also break in the case of a crash," reasons Deheselle. "We spoke with the factory about breakaway screws and the feedback they'd had from the market was that they were breaking away too easily or had a screw that doesn't break at all. You are not matching the need of the user."

"Overall we said 'if we can design something that is ours then let's do it differently'," asserts Batsch. "The same with the goggles with the large dimensions and clean lines and the Prospect was well accepted. It is a clean, pure and refined helmet design compared to some others on the market that look aggressive. People would not buy our 'replica' of another brand. We've had super-positive feedback and people liked it was something different."

Every product has a compromise, and for the 550 team their point of concern remained in one area...but, considering their peers on helmet shelves in dealerships around the world, it is not a deal-breaker. "Let's speak frankly: the compromise was the weight. It is not the lightest on the market but that was necessary for full DOT certification."

"We are at 1380 grams which is not super-light but not crazy-heavy and the feedback we've had from riders is that it's very well balanced and doesn't bother them on the bike."



Having ticked many of the boxes they wanted to achieve with the 550 perhaps Scott's hardest job will be convincing the public and the riders that a lid from their product catalogue is one worth as much attention as a Prospect is for people hunting new goggles. The 550 should damage a wallet to the extent of 260 euros, and considering what is packed in the box and what should help keep everything 'packed' in a person's head then it is a matter worthy of further analysis. "You need to spend a bit of time 'selling' the helmet and this is where it will be a bit of a challenge for us," says Batsch. "People might choose a helmet because of a colour and that's fine but for those who don't have 700 euros to spend and are hesitating and wondering about what a helmet could do then we hope to target them and explain some of the technical safety benefits."

"We have put on a white sheet what we are bringing with this helmet and I think people can see the advantages," underlines Lalloz. "The main direction of the project was safety and everybody knows your head is the main 'motor' in your body."

It seems the choice for motorcyclists suddenly became a bit deeper...and those on two wheels are fortunate companies like Scott continue to find realistic and achievable solutions.





MAKING OF SCOTT'S 550 HELMET







## atlas

Three versions of Atlas' superb Air brace model for 2018 come in 'Ghost', 'Nightshift' and 'Ruck' shades. There are various other designs, and all the shades are also available with the Prodigy and Tyke models for youths and kids respectively. The strength of Atlas' products comes in their clear functional simplicity. They are light too; the Air balancing at 590g (1.3lbs).

The braces are made from a flexible polymer construction and a split-flex frame to promote mobility. The unit sits round the spine and sternum with 300mm of chest suspension, meaning 27% more body contact against other competitors on the market. The easy open release system has been updated for 2018 and two height adjustments and six mounts are possible with the Air. There are five sizes in total to fit any type of body shape or dimension.

Ryan Villopoto, Jason Anderson and Evgeny Bobryshev are hard converts to Atlas' capabilities. Click on any link and browse the website for more info and imagery.

[www.atlasbrace.com](http://www.atlasbrace.com)









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MOTOGP

# WINTER TESTING

JEREZ · NOVEMBER 20th-24th





JEREZ TESTING









JEREZ TESTING









JEREZ TESTING





# WINTERY TIMES...

As the crates were stacked and packed away into race trucks, it was easy for the mind to wander toward the beach and conclude on-track action was done for the year. But in MotoGP, development barely stops. Just a week on from an exhaustive two-day test at Valencia, there were yet more laps planned in order to get one, last, definitive understanding before the finishing touches are applied over the winter months.

Five of the six factories were present at Jerez in the final week in November, while Yamaha employees were tasked with another jet-lag heavy trip to Malaysia to spend two days firmly out of the media's glare. Of the factory runners, only Honda's men Marc Marquez and Dani Pedrosa had time off, their understanding of the new RC213V engine sufficiently grasped.

Yamaha, Ducati and Suzuki all had chassis and engine combinations to sample. True to recent form, KTM rolled out a new frame, swingarm, wheel rims and much improved electronics at Valencia. And with "something big coming" in early December for test rider Mika Kallio, one could easily make a convincing case for the Austrian factory pushing toward the top six in 2018.

And while Suzuki's preseason started off in fairly precarious fashion, with riders Andrea Iannone and Alex Rins bed-stricken inside their motorhomes on Tuesday at Valencia, there were signs of optimism within a camp that had endured such contrasting fortunes through the year. On the basis of their efforts in November, it's tempting to wonder whether the GSX-RR could be the most improved machine in 2018.

It's never easy bedding in two riders to a new bike and team - even more so when one (Rins) suffers a series of injuries and the other (Iannone) finds stirring up motivation a chore.

The end of year proved, with some 'tidying up' of the set-up at a test in Aragon in September, the GSX-RR remains a handy weapon at several tracks.

There were moments through this year as chastening as any the factory experienced since its return to MotoGP at the close of '14, with both riders finishing outside the points in Barcelona and Iannone's retirement out of last position at Misano chief among them. Johann Zarco's seamless adaptation to MotoGP machinery must have rankled with certain parts of the management too. But with Rins quietly progressing in the season's second half - to the point of out-scoring his teammate in a gutsy ride at Valencia - Iannone has a competitor in the opposite corner that can push him week in, week out.

Also, vetting parts for Suzuki's '18 bike appeared to confirm to Iannone this project is worth fighting for. "This gave Andrea more confidence," revealed Brivio before the



By Neil Morrison



end of the year. "I saw him more relaxed, more confident looking ahead. The Aragon test was very positive for, let's say, mood and a motivation point of view."

And at Jerez there were further signs of a considered working process that is carefully building toward 2018. Iannone, Rins and test rider Sylvain Guintoli were all present, putting a series of engine and chassis combinations through their paces. The approach was clear: test and re-test frame and engine tweaks over and over again to ensure feedback is consistent and riders are in agreement.

"We have some components to choose for 2018," explained Rins' crew chief Jose Manuel Cazeaux. "We are trying to be careful to do one step at a time. Riders already know the bike quite well. The plan is a bit messy but basically we have some engines to test to define the base for 2018. We have to be careful to try to do many laps on each. We have some chassis components also."

This caution is well reasoned; a year ago at the end of November, Rins was recovering from a fractured vertebrae, leaving Iannone and Japanese test rider Takuya Tsuda alone at Jerez to evaluate Suzuki's '17 engine. Fresh off a Ducati and working alongside Marco Rigamonti, his crew chief of the previous four years, the Italian pair did not yet have intimate knowledge of the GSX-RR. That engine choice proved costly. In October Brivio acknowledged the motor was partly to blame for Iannone's continuing complaints in corner entry. "For sure it was not helping," said Cazeaux. "It was even making it a bit worse than before."

"I think the choices they can do this year are more secure than what we did last winter, when one rider was a rookie and injured, and another was coming from a bike that was a bit different from this one," said Cazeaux. "We are enthusiastic about this winter that is coming."

The riders appear grounded in reality too. Speaking to Iannone, it was clear he was expecting no miracle cure for all of Suzuki's woes. "I agree that Suzuki didn't come here with a completely new bike. Just improvements here, here, here, here and here. Many things are a big step. We don't make a big step with one thing, a unique thing. Sometimes small results in all areas are a big result." The speed was there. Iannone was just 0.4s off the circuit record at Jerez - and without using a soft tyre to boot. Meanwhile Rins felt his race pace to be "fantastic".

Suzuki seems a happy place once more. Those testing and engine concessions that were lost in 2017 will return next year and there are two riders that will feel capable of challenging one another. After all, this is largely the same squad that finished fourth in the rider's championship just twelve months ago. With KTM continuing its upward trajectory, and Suzuki prospering, it appears MotoGP's depth in quality will be undiminished in the following twelve months.







JEREZ TESTING









JEREZ TESTING





# TIME FOR BRITAIN'S SPORTING 'OSCAR

When I was growing up as a kid, Saturday afternoons in the UK were dominated by BBC Grandstand. For those that don't remember it, it was a live sports show that started around midday with Football Focus, a preview of all the football taking place later in the day. The rest of the broadcast was centered around live horse racing and was interspersed with other live events and highlights packages; the diversity ranging from darts to wrestling to ice skating, car racing and whatever was on at the time.

It is a little known fact that the motorsport discipline of Rallycross was invented by the BBC to show on Grandstand when they didn't have horse racing to show.

The rival network ITV had their own similar 'World of Sport' programme but it was the BBC that utterly dominated television sports broadcasting in Britain until the advent of Sky in the 1990's.

One of the highlights at the end of the year was the BBC Sports Personality of the Year, now known just as SPOTY since the full title is too long for Twitter and millennial's thumbs can't cope.

It's a show where in the past a panel of journalists and commentators voted for the biggest 'personality' across all sports.

It further strengthened the BBC position in sports coverage as it was quite a coveted title to be awarded. The show was beamed live on a random Sunday evening in December from the BBC's HQ in London.

In recent years, like most things, it is decided by a public vote, most of which takes place as a phone-in on the night, and the event now travels the country and takes a format like a stadium rock concert.

In 2014 it came to Glasgow. My son was invited as a guest in recognition of his achievements with the Special Olympics Great Britain cycling team and went along the red carpet in front of the paparazzi like all the big stars. Having witnessed it firsthand it was just how I would imagine something like the Oscars would be.

On that night I bumped into James Toseland. He was there as a guest as well, having himself been nominated for the award in 2007 when he won the Superbike World Championship. He was the last motorcycle racer to be up for the title, until now.

In the recent past the BBC has been criticised for having a predictable and narrow range of sport stars nominated for the camera trophy. Minority sports have been marginalized in the face of Team GB's relentless Olympic medal winners – Mo Farah, Chris Hoy, Bradley Wiggins, Jessica Ennis – along with the A-listers like Andy Murray and Lewis Hamilton. My own view is that the slow demise of the BBC's position as the main sport's broadcaster in the UK, and the cost of broadcasting rights, was limiting their ability to put



# CARS'

By Graeme Brown



a show together that could highlight various sporting events. They concentrated on events where they had their own broadcast rights.

Every year at this time I see in my little social media echo chamber the howls of derision that no one from motorcycle racing is considered. Last year I think between them MotoGP, WorldSBK and BSB got about 2 minutes airtime in a three hour show.

When Jonathan Rea won his third successive WorldSBK title at Magny Cours my social media bubble exploded. There were online petitions put together right away to have him nominated for #SPOTY17. To be fair to the BBC in JR's home country of Northern Ireland they have been huge supporters of motorcycle racing. They broadcast the North West 200 road race live online and on the radio each year and they have sent a crew to WorldSBK races to document Jonathan's championship wins each season. JR has appeared on BBC NI news and sport's shows as well as one of the biggest chat shows in the country, The Nolan Show.

He has become one of the A-listers in what they term as "Our Wee Country", and quite rightly so.

I knew a week or so before it was announced and was sworn to secrecy but this year Jonathan will line up alongside some of Britain's sporting royalty as one of the 12 who will go into the public vote for the 2017 title during the live show from Liverpool on Sunday 17th December.

Jonathan has a real chance of lifting the famous silver trophy. Whilst current favourites, Mo Farah, Lewis Hamilton and boxer Anthony Joshua will command a huge proportion of the general viewing public's, JR will have the backing of a large part of the motorcycle racing fans in Britain and I am sure the whole of Northern Ireland as well.

Part of the show on the night is an edited package that highlights the sport's stars achievement over the year and hopes to show their personality away from their sport. BBC NI have already been and filmed Jonathan at home with wife Tatia and his son's Jake and Tyler and a film crew also came to Jerez

for the recent test to complete the package. Jonathan is one of those sport's stars who really does have a 'personality' – last year Andy Murray won for a third time! His devotion to his racing is clear but that takes equal billing to his family life and that will be something that will hopefully come across to the voting public.

I guess as motorcycle racing fans we should make the most of his nomination this year. The likelihood of another British star being nominated in the future is minimal, unless of course there is a four-in-a-row for JR. So lets all get voting and give our man the best chance of winning. I have one fan here that wishes he was treading the red carpet again on the night and his phone is burning a whole in his pocket waiting to vote.





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## the bike shed

More Christmas options and The Bike Shed have a very cool and attainable list of product. Maybe it's not the best weather for a t-shirt but the designs are elegant (perhaps not The Bike Shed flaming zombie!) and the price hovers from 30-35 pounds.

The Ducati T-Shirt in blue and dark grey stands out and the standard BSMC logo can be found on tees as well as pullovers. Beanies, buckles and even retro style helmets are in the expanding portfolio. We've checked out the garments and the material and build is of good quality.

The last time we visited The Bike Shed shop in Shoreditch, central London the shop was a tempting cavern of treats and usable gear. If the excellent coffee, food, décor or general vibe doesn't entice you inside then the shelves certainly will.

[www.thebikeshed.cc](http://www.thebikeshed.cc)











# TEARING UP THE SCRIPT

By Neil Morrison, Photos by CormacGP & [www.teamtech3.fr](http://www.teamtech3.fr)



**L**osail, Qatar. 26th March. 21:45. MotoGP 2017 is not yet forty seconds old when the first real moment of surprise plays out. From a second row starting slot, Johann Zarco, two-time Moto2 world champion and France's most decorated road racing export to date, steals an early lead from a fast starting Andrea Iannone. Any suspicions this would be a momentary flutter with fame in front of the cameras were soon absolved. A minute on and Zarco was gapping the leaders.

Surely this wasn't in the script. But through 2017 Zarco became accustomed to ripping up any of the supposed pages. And while that wonderful twelve-minute cameo under the floodlights ended in an unceremonious slide through the gravel, it was just the beginning.

Had it not been for Andrea Dovizioso's late career renaissance amid an absorbing title fight with Marquez, Zarco would surely be this year's surprise story. Little wonder his name already sits at the top of several factories' shopping lists for 2019.

For ending the year sixth overall was no mean feat. Three podiums, two pole positions and a points haul of 174 was beyond what anyone had expected. He was the year's top rookie among a talented field. And the best of the grid's eleven satellite machines too. Only Ben Spies had amassed more in a 'satellite'-backed rookie campaign in the MotoGP era. Tech 3 team boss Hervé Poncharal called it "A magic story. A dream. Nobody was expecting that."

***"ZARCO HAS FREQUENTLY TAKEN HEART FROM MOST EXPERIENCES THIS YEAR, WHILE ALSO ACCEPTING HIS OWN SHORTCOMINGS. REMAINING CALM & GROUNDED HAS BEEN ONE THING. BUT TO POSSESS AN OUTLOOK WITH SUCH MEASURED CANDOUR IS FAIRLY UNIQUE."***

As the year stretched from spring to summer, the Frenchman would not go away, a constant thorn in the side of the factory-backed, front running regulars. As the exhaustive flyaway's rolled around in autumn, Zarco appeared possessed, riding – and fighting – like a seasoned pro.

From losing a seat in Suzuki's MotoGP team to showing up Yamaha's lead riders come the season's end, the past 18 months have been a whirlwind for the 27-year old.

Yet more than the numbers, it was Zarco's method and temperament that really grabbed attention. Only eventual champion Marquez led more laps than the Frenchman across the 18 races, an astonishing feat for a rookie in the class, and one that underlines how often he attacked the occasion. This time a year ago who would have envisioned him outscoring both factory Yamahas six times from 18 outings?

An enthralling term, but several instances stood out.



## JOHANN ZARCO'S 2017 STORY

One came in front of an adoring crowd at Le Mans. Putting the incessant home pressure to one side and snatching a first front row start in the top class caught the eye – but the way he achieved it left a deep impression. Finding himself in Q1 after conditions in FP3 caught him out, Zarco had a plan of his own. Rather than obeying the conventional routine of ‘fit new tyre, do fast lap, pit and repeat,’ the Frenchman felt it better to ease his way in, regain confidence and build up to an explosive finish. He did ten consecutive laps without pitting – a new means of attacking the qualifying shootouts in certain conditions. Going on to qualify third through the same means in Q2 was just as dazzling.

The same could be said for Qatar, his fourth place at Jerez (passing five riders in an astonishing first four laps), a fifth in Texas (pouncing aggressively on Rossi and incurring his wrath thereafter), and a podium at Sepang (managing a soft rear tyre until the end). Not only did each outing show an ability to extract the most from the machinery at his disposal. There is a fierce independence therein, a total conviction in his own methods. “He’s able to decide for one choice even if the others go with another,” says Guy Coulon, Johann’s crew chief, and co-creator of the Tech 3 team in 1989. “He always keeps his line.”

There was an ever-present, sense of glee at rattling the class’ established names, too. Valentino Rossi was a regular complainer, his recent words comparing the Frenchman’s technique to Formula1’s champion-in-waiting Max Verstappen, carrying an intentional sting. “Neither one of them ever brakes,” the veteran Italian told national radio.





# 0 FEATURE





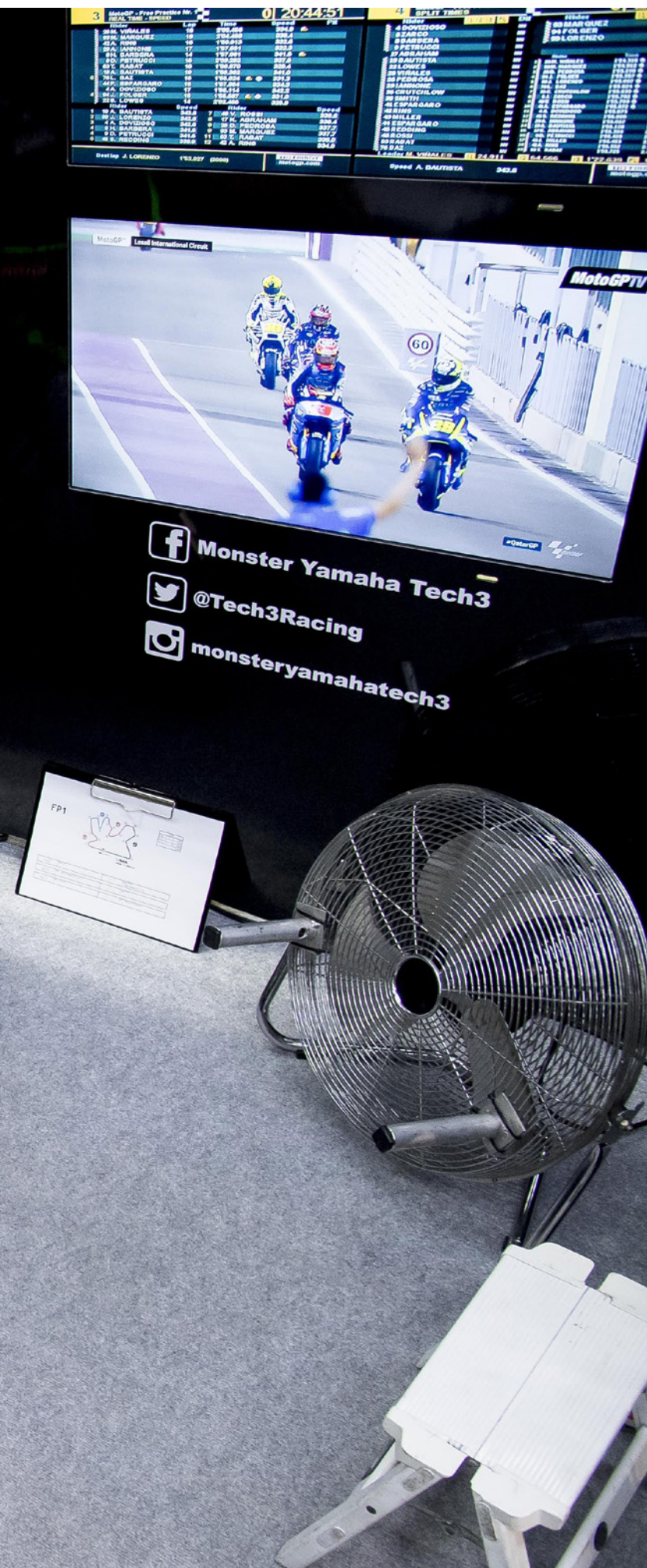
## JOHANN ZARCO'S 2017 STORY

"You have to move to the side with him, because the danger is that both of you will end up going off." There were further complaints regarding his aggression from Rossi at CotA, Jorge Lorenzo at Motegi, and Rossi again at Phillip Island.

But this was far from senseless needling. There was a method to it all; with Zarco believing the best, quickest means of learning was to place himself among the top talents. "I could see how they are riding, how they can control and be clever during the race," he said of his experience in Qatar. "It's a good lesson for me [because] I need to learn." According to Coulon, this approach stems from Zarco's desire to control the racing conditions. "He knew this from Moto2," says Coulon. "He told me: 'sometimes I feel that other riders are faster than me but my understanding was to control them from the beginning of the race. If they pass me, I'll try and pass them back immediately. And I'll try to control them. At the end of the race, I'll try to push and to beat them.'"

"He knows that if you cannot control faster riders at the beginning of the race, you cannot control them at the end," says Coulon. "So you need to understand that and to manage this situation. It's quite easy to say! And another thing to do it properly."

While taking flak from several high-profile names, Marquez recognised something in the double world champion's tactics amid a high-speed scrap at Jerez. "[He] Reminds me of me when I arrived in MotoGP," Marquez said soon after.





"[He's] Really aggressive, pushing on the limit, warnings and nearly crash. But in the end it's the way to learn." Come the eight-rider duel at Phillip Island, Zarco was reveling in it all: "I lived some moments I've never lived before," he said. "Fighting at this speed is so incredible."

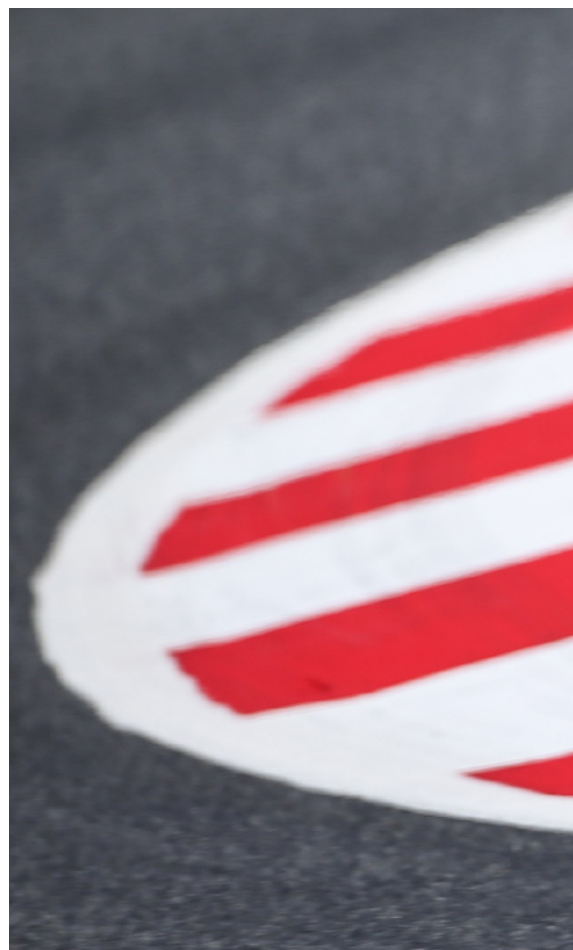
Aside from fearlessness, Zarco has shown panache for extenuating positives from possible setbacks. Here is a rider whose optimism is not based on an empty conviction that 'it will turn out alright in the end.' He has frequently taken heart from most experiences this year, while also accepting his own shortcomings. Remaining calm and grounded has been one thing. But to possess an outlook with such measured candour is fairly unique. Take his dealing with teammate Jonas Folger's preseason speed, which outshone his own. "I can think that we all love motorbikes," he said in April. "That's why if he is better than me I can be happy for him. He's a nice guy. Getting angry because he's faster than me will not help me be faster so why not stay positive?"

Even his visible disdain for journalist's incessant digging into Yamaha's plans for this off-season and beyond was amusingly impressive. Zarco was fast on the '17 M1 at the Valencia test just three days after Rossi and Maverick Viñales had ditched the same bike for that final race.

"When we remember Valentino at Aragon - he did a great race, and he was with the injured leg," Zarco said. "If the bike was really bad and with the injury, he could not be in the front." There is an unwillingness to follow a simply constructed narrative.

Only working on extrapolating his situation. And for this, his coach and personal manager Laurent Fellon, must take great credit. It was but six years ago when Zarco was the butt of paddock jokes, the nearly man who seemed destined to throw away a series winning opportunities.

But accepting his status as a satellite rider, and ceasing to complain spurred him on. And endeared him to those working around him. "He is very clear when he explains his bike's feelings," explains Coulon. "We prepare a plan before each session. It depends on the track. Mainly we decide on three runs or two runs, because some tracks with longer lap times we like better with less runs. We decide in advance, 'This amount of runs.'





## JOHANN ZARCO'S 2017 STORY

After we change bikes and try something different for the second run. He respects this plan. Even if the bike is not perfect, he keeps going to the end of the run to understand if it is a comfortable problem. Even with this feeling that is not so perfect, he can get a lap time. If we decided for seven laps, he does seven laps.

"This is quite important because some riders you ask for seven laps. After two laps they come back, stop and [say] 'I don't like it!' [I think] 'You don't like it after two laps, yes. But maybe after four laps you can understand whether your tyre life is better, or whether your lap time is coming better.' Finally we never know. We had a very similar situation with Dovi [Dovizioso] in 2012. Dovi and Johann have a very similar kind of mind."

Team boss Hervé Poncharal also noted Zarco's ability to deal with all the trimmings that come with mixing it among the class' leading names. "He's very different," says Poncharal. "Not only in terms of performance, but the way he behaves. He's a normal guy. I like it a lot because a lot of guys here are 23, 24, getting money, getting famous, easy life, losing contact with real life. Johann doesn't change. He was happy all the weekend to sit and educate the young riders he looks after at his racing school. He's just happy to hang out with the hospitality guys in the evening. His strength is that he's a normal guy. He's happy to do what he loves but he doesn't behave or think that he's a superstar. And this is important."





So why did this all come as such a surprise? It may appear strange to have casted doubt on a double world champion with a win tally in the intermediate class that was just two shy of Lorenzo, and one of Marquez. But, aside from a title challenge in 2011, Zarco's career was fairly undecorated up until his first championship year in 2016. When identifying traits of the current greats that litter the top class, one facet stands out: the rate at which one adapts to a new class, or machinery. Browsing through Zarco's past, this did not feature highly. It took him 47 attempts to win a 125cc race. And 54 before he could justifiably say he had mastered a 600cc four-stroke by winning in Moto2. Considering this, his performances early into his MotoGP career are all the more remarkable.

The rider from Cannes in southern France acknowledges his arrival in the premier class coincided with a lifting of the incessant pressures of expectation. Defending his Moto2 crown in 2016 was a tiring business. Riding, he came to learn, as 'the man the field is aiming for' took a lot out of him. "The pressure was last year, when I was playing for a second title," he said in April. "I felt this and I had to live with that ... Maybe the fact that I'm not under pressure, like I was in Moto2 last year, this can help me to just go."

Zarco's talent cannot be discounted. To make a soft option rear tyre last for the race's entirety, as he did on several occasions, requires exceptional throttle application. Coulon again: "Johann managed tyre choice quite well. Finally, we never had a problem at the end of a [dry] race with our choice."

That stands out to Michelin's outgoing technical director Nicolas Goubert, too. "A guy using soft tyres being more consistent at the end of the race than another one having picked up medium or hard tyres – it's just down to the bike's set-up and the rider's ability."

So what does the future hold for the 27-year old? One must imagine Yamaha will utilize his strengths through winter testing at the start of 2018. It is hard to see the factory following past tradition and supplying Tech 3 with year-old machinery this time around with Rossi and Viñales' recent struggles still fresh. Judging by his latest showings, a first premier class victory will surely be the target.

Only this time there will be considerable expectations to conquer. And a 'silly-season' that will no-doubt bubble-over early into the year could nibble away at focus.

But, as witnessed over the past three years, Zarco has the attributes to tussle at the front for years to come. "I was fighting for the victory on Sunday," he told a throng of reporters at Valencia. "And my first day of the test I am one of the top riders, so that's just fantastic." Somehow, it feels as though the journey won't end here.







# mxgp album 2017

[www.motocrossgpalbum.com](http://www.motocrossgpalbum.com)

Stanley Leroux has been producing his MXGP yearbook for almost a decade and the 2017 wrap of the Grand Prix season is the usual high quality, glossy and hard-pack production. Over 200 pages of never-before-published photographs (that are always a little different and usually quite intimate thanks to the Frenchman's good contacts and knowledge of the sport) make the book that extra bit special.

As a Christmas treat for motocross fans it is an easy win. The texts are usually in English and French and with exclusive content. Books from 2010 to 2016 are sold-out and you can preview some of the pages on the official website. There are standard and limited edition prints. 'MXGP Album 2017' is in stock and shipping now.





# THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

In Indonesia's deep mud Tim Gajzer quickly worked his way into second place, but soon started to make mistakes that cost him the podium, eventually falling to seventh. Meanwhile Antonio Cairoli had experienced a poor start, but taking it on the snot way the Italian slowly came back from the dead. He passed Gajzer – his main opponent for the title chase by the time – on lap ten, while the latter was experiencing struggles. In the end Cairoli moved up to fourth of the single race of the Grand Prix, the next one having been cancelled.

## Le Lièvre et la Tortue

Dans la boue profonde d'Indonésie, Tim Gajzer prit rapidement la seconde place de la course, mais ne tarda pas à commettre des erreurs qui l'éloignèrent du podium, dégringolant finalement à la septième place. Pendant ce temps, Antonio Cairoli, auteur d'un mauvais départ, mais affichant un rythme prudent, remonta tout doucement des profondeurs du classement. Il passa Tim Gajzer, alors son principal adversaire à la course, au dixième tour, tandis que ce dernier est en difficulté aux prises avec le terrain indouésien. Cairoli termina quatrième de la seule course de la journée. La seconde manche ayant été annulée. Rien ne sert de courir, il faut partir à point!



Benoit Peduzzi and Arnaud Tonus with English photographer Ray Archer  
Benoit Peduzzi & Arnaud Tonus avec Ray Archer, photographe anglais



Monster Energy girls  
by [www.teamtech3.fr](http://www.teamtech3.fr)











'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.

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